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Wm Lea

J. Peters

12/6

Rev. W. Lea
from the Author
SCRIPTURE AND THE CHURCH

IN HARMONY,
THE STRONGHOLDS OF TRUTH AND PEACE

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE CHURCH OF ST. LAWRENCE, LUDLOW,

ON TUESDAY, MAY 5, 1846,

At the Visitation

OF THE

VENERABLE WILLIAM VICKERS, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF SALOP, IN THE DIOCESE OF HEREFORD.

BY

JOHN MILLER, M.A.

OF WORCESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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*Presented to the
Rev. the Clergy*

TO THE VENERABLE

WILLIAM VICKERS, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF SALOP, IN THE DIOCESE OF HEREFORD,

AND TO THE

REVEREND THE CLERGY

OF THE DEANERIES MEETING AT LUDLOW,

This Sermon,

PREACHED BEFORE THEM,

AND NOW PRINTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR KIND DESIRE,

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

BOCKLETON,
MAY XI, MDCCCXLVI.

MANY reasons would have forbidden the writer of this Sermon to re-appear so soon in print (and particularly on the present subject), but for the expression of wishes to which he would have felt it ungracious not to defer. But as it is always possible there may be Reverend Brethren who, in listening to a Sermon on such occasions, feel themselves unable to assent to all its positions, the Author does not mean to imply, in the Dedication, any thing which should unduly implicate *them* in a supposed approval of sentiments, which delicacy alone may have prevented them from openly excepting against.



A

S E R M O N,

8c.

HEBREWS xiii. 8 and part of 9.

“JESUS CHRIST the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.
Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.”

WE find this affirmation—“JESUS CHRIST the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever”—between an exhortation given to the Hebrew disciples to “remember those who had spoken unto them the word of God,” and an emphatic charge “not to be carried about with divers and strange doctrines.” I do not see how we can construe words so placed, in any natural way, without acknowledging that (with whatever sense besides) they must at least imply the sameness, as well as perpetuity, of all essential Christian doctrine.

But it is no part of my purpose to enter into any sort of critical disquisition. The words are taken for a text to-day merely as laying good foundation for certain general thoughts about to be proposed, with reference to a specific snare and evil of the

times. And in employing them to this effect, I would desire to speak only and altogether in the spirit of "taking counsel here together in the house of God as friends;" not in the needless tone of one who would presume to school his fellow-labourers, but rather for "comparison of notes," to use a familiar phrase, if haply there may be response found within the minds of sympathising brethren. "I speak as to wise men—judge ye what I say."

Where patience must to some extent be unavoidably intreated, it would be an unwarrantable trespass on it to enter here, by way of introduction, on any large detail of those abundant evidences which manifest a restless and uneasy state of things among us. Such are assuredly at hand, in too great plenty; but let them (in the greater part) be taken for granted. It may suffice here to remark, that if there be one feature of our days more prominent than all besides, it is, perhaps, a general departure from every manner of simplicity. In lesser and in greater things alike, *simplicity* is out of date and fashion, in an age dwindling in faith, but growing rapidly in self-reliance, and much enervated withal by the advance of luxury on every hand. Nor is this ruinous departure more apparent any where than in the writings of the day; there reaching, with unhappy influence, to no small portion of our current theology, and still more largely visible in other popular statements bearing, and meant to bear, upon our tone of Christianity. From very

many indications to be seen, it might not only be a natural question, but one not easily to be avoided, "Is, then, the simple truth which JESUS CHRIST and His Apostles taught, no longer the same? is the old revelation worn out? are we reduced to an impervious strait, without the aid of new developments? are such the only satisfying food for man's enlarged intellect¹?"

My aim will be to show that we are not in such condition. But while in doing this I do not mean to speak controversially, there is an absolute need of setting forth some single illustration, to make the line of our inquiry plain before us. Wherefore, since some one sample must be fixed upon, observe the following, which is within the reach of all to verify. It will combine palpable proof of an existing restless disposition, and of that wide departure from simplicity in men's prevailing manner of writing, which has been just now mentioned.

Listen to words, then, of a foreign writer², pronounced to be "of great ability," and his work of a "very high order." "It is often said that Christianity has civilized us. Perhaps it would not be less just, or less exact, to say, that civilization has purified our Christianity. If the letter of the Gos-

¹ See Appendix.

² "We quote from a recent French writer, of great ability, Charles Dunoyer, *Liberté du Travail*, i. 124. This work, which by its title might seem a cold dry treatise on political economy, is of a very high order."—*Quarterly Review*, No. cliv. p. 459.

pels has not changed, we have changed much in our manner of understanding and applying the evangelical law. Our religious sentiments and principles have followed the march of all our sentiments and principles; they are become more pure and more reasonable, in such proportion as we have become more cultivated. The Christians of to-day are not after the pattern of those of two hundred and fifty years ³ ago." How is an inference to be avoided here—that then, if this be the true way of putting the question, not God's revelation, with its accompanying means of grace, has civilised man, but man's advances in refinement have improved upon the counsels of God? But let that pass.

The writer who has quoted these vain words with warm approval, goes on to say not many pages after—that "what is wanted is a Christianity, not for a few monks or monk-like men; not for a small imaginative past-worshipping aristocracy; no, nor for a pious, unreasoning peasantry; but for men of the world. Not of this world, as we may be tauntingly asserted to mean—but men who ever feel that their present sphere of duty, of virtue, of usefulness to mankind, lies in this world on their way to a higher and better—men of intelligence, activity, of exemplary and wide-working goodness—men of faith,

³ In the original, "*du temps de la Ligue*," meaning, I presume, the League of 1577. The reason for avoiding abrupt introduction of such an expression as "the League," and for speaking only in round numbers, will be obvious.

yet men of truth, to whom truth is of GOD, and to whom nothing is of GOD that is not true; men whose religion is not sadly and vainly retrospective, but present and hopefully prospective. It is our fixed persuasion that . . . human intelligence will pursue its onward way. The word of GOD is alone immutable, and that part of Christianity (however it may have been developed) which is the word of GOD, that alone has the power of endurance to the end of the world. The in-dwelling Spirit of Christ, not confined to one narrow discipline, to one visible polity, is still to be developed in more abundant power, to exalt, to purify the primal idea of Christianity, the true, the eternal, the immutable, the real ‘*Dominus nobiscum*,’ which is commingled with our humanity.”

It will be obvious that language such as this is not selected for its intelligibleness; for of a truth it might pretend to almost any characteristic rather than that. But it is thus adduced for illustration’s sake, and just to give sufficient present insight into the sort of dreamy visions now abounding upon the question of “development,” partly from the position which it occupies in that which still, perhaps, retains the highest place among our periodicals; (where—seeing that it forms the peroration of a censure on a well-known extravagant hypothesis, perhaps less really dangerous than its own—it may pass current even with applause from many;) and in another part, because a reference to speculations

of an unknown writer cannot be fairly liable to charge of personal or party feeling. Add yet a third consideration—that it displays the manner of appliance now addressed more specially to the refined and (if the word may be excused) cosmopolite classes of society. On other grounds it might be little worthy of attention.

Keeping such specimen in mind, let us remember also—that, while it is impossible to doubt the tendency of all such speculations (namely, to change or supersede all hitherto received landmarks) they yet are not to be accounted of as utterly unmixed with truth, or to be set aside effectually by any rude or peremptory impatience. It is a plausible entanglement of truth with florid sophistry that gives them currency. For instance, it is true that Christianity has power to adapt its lessons, and its supplies of strength and grace, to all our wants, and to the wants of each successive age; how could it reasonably claim to be a final revelation, and be without such power? The question is not of the fact, but of the way of its accomplishment. Neither are such rash theories deliberate suggestions of an adversary; but, for the most part, they wear Christian colours, and are advanced under a Christian banner. And that man's confidence is hardly to be envied, who never is in any way perplexed by such delusions; seeing that it may rest too probably in such a case, more on determined stubbornness of resolution, than on a calm, well-weighed, and well-

assured conviction of heart. For it would be no easy task to even the most subtle intellect, to give a logical and perfect answer to any one of many such perverse questionings. To see that none of them are safe is very easy; but that is quite another thing from being able to confute them formally. We may be rightly confident there is pernicious error lurking in all; but for all that they are disquieting. We do not for the moment see our way through them; and we have need of anchorage, and of a quiet haven for shelter of our faith accordingly, where we may "wait for the day."

To understand this need at once—turn from these reveries of what men choose to fancy, or to call, an *intellectual* Christianity (such as would seem, at very least, to speak a need of two Gospels: one for the more refined and civilized, and another for the less instructed portions of the Good Shepherd's one flock) to what we know to be realities; namely, the circumstances of our own actual position, the daily sights of own eyes, and hearing of our own ears.

And first, as to ourselves. Doubtless it is both fit and right that we should be alive, in fair proportion, to man's intellectual progress, and to his schemes and goings on, that we may learn the more to judge and discipline ourselves, and to stand more on guard against existing or impending snares. And it perhaps may be the very blindness of a self-deceiving indolence to shrink from all such know-

ledge, as if we could thereby secure ourselves against the inroads of the gainsayer. Yet, all the while, how vain it were for most of us even to think of entering at large into the multitude of strifes and questionings, engendered of a wilful generation, "seeking," as it might seem, "for signs, where none will be given!" It is, indeed, our bounden duty not to meddle with them; for does not Scripture give express warnings upon this very head? And if it were a right and wise thing for one in the Apostle's own days, to keep himself aloof from "doubtful disputations," how much increased must be our own need of taking care that neither through perplexity, nor false shame, nor wish of humouring the people, nor yet through any other snare which may beset us, we let ourselves become entangled in such hopeless labyrinth! Of sheer necessity we must confine our views to something much more simple, more truly suited to the common wants of men, and level to their common apprehension, than any of these crude imaginings of a diseased intellect. From these it is the only reasonable inference, that *nothing is settled*. And then, if that be so—at once the question comes upon us, "Whence have we our commission of so high a sort, and where is our authority to teach at all?" So that we plainly need (as just now said) some haven of more quiet thought, wherein to keep our minds at peace; and some abiding reasonable confidence, nowise akin to blind presumption, in strength of which to labour

on, and fight our way, while “militant here on earth.”

For what, in such a region as our own, is our position and our work? Among whom is our lot cast, and whom is it our high commission to instruct and guide in what we either rightly do believe to be the way of life, or there is no such way? Chiefly (beyond dispute or doubt) those most remote from speculative fancies, or intellectual pretensions; the brethren born to actual toil on humbler or on somewhat more advanced scale—the busy and the unlearned—the poor—and those who minister to our own daily wants, or to the wants of others. And what is it we have to teach to these, and what to do as best we may among them? Is it not, in the first place, to convince our disciples of sin; to make them feel that they have souls to save; to call on them to use, with persevering faith, CHRIST’S own appointed means of grace; and in the strength of these, to lead them in the path of bounden duty, in the familiar relations of life; in short, both to instruct and guide them in ways, and upon subjects, altogether practical? And this for the hope’s sake of an eternal recompence, and on the ground of certain acts of infinite love, which have been done, for their and our sakes, “once for all;” each of a kind to stir the best affections of the heart, in such wise as to quicken and supply, from time to time, the most effectual motives to obedience.

If, then, we truly mean and seek—and if our duty

be—to guide and to persuade men, not merely to amuse or to cajole them, the very nature of the case requires some plain and simple form and substance of instruction; to be restrained within prescribed and manageable bounds, and offered with some credible warrant of authority, under appeal to an acknowledged permanent standard. Not that we need, or ought, at any time to fall into that vulgar error, of speaking or of writing *down* to an imagined lower level of capacity. That error springs, as I believe, from a mistaken estimate of human nature, and has its root, too often, in an unhealthy pride of some presumed superiority. Nor do I know that there is any thing less welcome, or less entitled to approval of a thoughtful spirit, than all that virtual exclusion of the humbler classes, as objects of perpetual Christian interest, respect, and care, which, though perhaps it may not be intended, is unavoidably involved in many of our more refined visions of an improved, or, as so many would appear to dream, improveable Christianity. Have not the poor, and those of every humbler grade of intellectual accomplishment, “one LORD, one faith, one baptism,” in common with ourselves? As to the prize before us, are we not looking for the same heaven? As to the elements, apart from the mere accidents of our condition, to borrow language very fit for a more sacred use, “have they not eyes, organs, senses, affections, passions? are they not fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons,

subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter” as ourselves? Where we have unsophisticated, and at the same time Christianly-minded flocks, let us be well assured we have to deal with very sound essential capacities.

Yet still, our ordinary hearers are obviously such as have no sympathy (and God forbid they should !) with laboured or capricious flights of intellect, or of fantastical imagination ; and therefore, neither is it wise (upon the other hand) to seek, or to attempt, to feed them with food “not convenient ;” with high conceits or views beyond their natural and wholesome range of moral apprehension. The teaching suitable for *them*—and is it not in substance so for all men?—is pointed out for us by an unerring authority ; “sound speech that cannot be condemned” —“wholesome words”—“doctrine according to godliness.” Our work is, with all pains and patience to open, not “put out the eyes” of such ; and while we strive to reconcile them to their unequal worldly lot, to raise them to their just equality as fellow Christians, and members of the one same body. What is it, then, of which all these, and such as they, may rightly be believed capable? And what is a sure ground on which, and the safe limits within which, we best may settle our own deep convictions, and have the fairest hope of teaching rightly, and as our LORD would have us teach in His name?

I am persuaded that increased reflection upon

such simple facts as these, will lead to an increased conviction that it must always, and inevitably, be a source of danger, to handle Christianity too *intellectually*. Exclusive (it is true) in one sad sense, the Gospel needs must be ; seeing how many shut themselves out of its pale and blessings, and “judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life.” But it is not for us to make it so. TRUTH’S best and strongest evidences must after all be found, not of a rarer and more logical kind, but open, or at least accessible to all “of honest and good heart,” using in faithfulness those faculties which GOD bestows on all, as human creatures, with little (it may be) of any but intuitive *knowledge*.

Now here—what is it, let us ask, which men of average capacity, with less of what is called acquirement—may be conceived to want, in the department of evidence ; and what is it, which such may fairly judge of ? Perhaps it were not prudent to insist, in any case, on the sufficiency of *mere* internal witness ; or to maintain that what is often so obscurely termed the “subjective” view of Christianity, may be entirely rested in. Yet in a thousand cases, and in tens of thousands, a very simple outward prop to this may be sufficient, and prove a surer strength than could be found in the most subtle form of laboured argument. And such plain help is constantly at hand in certain *actual phenomena* (Scripture itself being one of them), the force of which, if honestly borne out by ultimate

appeal to that Supreme Authority, in respect of an account to be rationally given of them, may then put on, in combination, the strength of an irrefragable testimony. And that, withal, of such a kind as may be judged of adequately by any man's fair, conscientious exercise of sober reason.

Such actual phenomena, presented to ourselves continually, are to be seen in the coincident existence of the New Testament, and of a visible Church—possessing Creeds and Sacraments, and an appointed lawful Ministry, and purporting to be a true branch of the one visible Church of CHRIST on earth, by rightful descent. Of course I mean, without invidious opposition of terms, the *Church* in essence, as separable from the accidents of the *Establishment*. That we have each of these, the SCRIPTURES and the CHURCH, among us, is something not to be denied.

Together with remembrance, then, of these, let thought be taken also of two undoubted dispositions of our common nature; on one hand, its impatience of restraint, and eagerness to follow every bent of individual inclination: upon the other, its not less certain tendency to overstrain the exercise of any intrusted authority. None, I presume, will think of questioning man's absolute need of the correlative and countervailing principles of "submission" and "authority." All will acknowledge it to be impossible to do without these. Wherefore the problem to be solved for man's best welfare—in civil and

in spiritual things alike, in their respective proportions—is how, and where, to fix a just balance between too little and too much of either.

With such remembrances, bring the two actual phenomena just spoken of, which are before our eyes continually, to the plain test proposed. “How came we in possession of these two? Whence, or why, is it that we have been instructed by and through them all along, and that we look to them, without misgiving, for our direction in the most important of all concerns—those of the soul?” Our supposition, bear in mind, is of a plain and honest man, of humble and believing spirit, weighing these things.

And here let us observe a third collateral circumstance, of no small moment to a right determining of these questions; namely, that all who differ from us, being believers, with one consent admit the power of one of these two instruments of God—the HOLY SCRIPTURES; nor can they be content (unless with very small exception) or able to conduct the ministrations of religion, without so far approaching toward a recognition of the other—THE CHURCH, as to set up a Ministry, and rules, and constitution of their own, each sect according to its own notions. When, therefore, certainly *these* two—the “Holy Scripture,” and “some especial form of government and ministration”—seem absolutely indispensable to maintenance and propagation of the TRUTH on earth, how is it that THE CHURCH, visibly constituted as we ourselves find it, has gained and kept its high pre-

eminence? Not its pre-eminence in worldly wealth or influence, but in Divine authority; its power of showing a commission, where others are unable so to do, and of manifesting itself as the receiver and keeper of "the deposit" from the beginning. At all events, this is a fact to be accounted for: and surely it is capable of being so explained and understood—without distortion or exaggeration—as that both faith and common sense may join in leading reasonable men—learned, or unlearned—to be content with that safe evidence which it so palpably supplies.

Neither, however, would the time permit, nor is it necessary to pursue the chain of argument here needed, link by link. What more concerns our present purpose, is to discern the bearing of such argument upon our own existing case; that we ourselves may find an anchor sure and stedfast—a place of shelter for our heart-convictions under whatever pressure of perplexing difficulties. Which that we may attain to, both "with the spirit and the understanding"—and neither blindly, nor through wilful imposition on our own reason—let me propose a summary criterion that we possess the real truth, in this manner.

Has Christian truth *ever* been held in purity, and unity of spirit? We cannot rationally doubt that it was pure, as held by earnest, humble-souled disciples, up to the end of that generation, many of whom, either in their own persons, or with the inter-

vention of the Apostles alone—"had heard, had seen with their eyes, had looked upon, or with their hands had handled the Word of life." Surely the "honest and good hearts" of that generation both knew what the Apostles taught, and how it had been understood both by themselves and others. A startling heresy, or bold hypothesis, might have excited a sensation and proved a cause of some immediate perplexity, as surely then as it does now; but faithful men would instantly have known it to be a new or strange thing, and would have treated it accordingly. And thus in point of fact it was, that, as the nature of the case required, heresies were sifted and judged, and the true Apostolic sense of that which was from the beginning fixed and maintained. But this by the way: our present work is but to weigh our own case.

Here then, for end of illustration, take the days quickly following the death of the Apostle St. John, as being an indisputable point of time at which the true faith must have been known, and all the books of the New Testament written, whether as yet universally received or not; and, on this groundwork, let us imagine the instance of some individual Christian, who had arrived at an acquaintance with the whole of those books, such as we now possess them. Let us suppose that it were possible for such a Christian now to appear among ourselves; to have our book of Common Prayer submitted to him; to take a place in the assembling of ourselves

together, where “all things should be done decently and in order;” to hear the truths which our Church teaches, and as it teaches them; to learn its constitution and existing form of government; and, in a word, to “prove” our own communion every way. Keeping an eye, then, fixed upon the test of “what is either obviously read in Holy Scripture, or may be surely proved, or fairly warranted thereby”—what shall we judge that the result might be?

No doubt there might be very much, in all the *accidents* of our existing state, that must, and would seem very strange to one of Rome, or Ephesus, or Corinth, whose lot had fallen at a date so far apart from ours in either of such different heritages. No doubt, there might and would be seen by him, in closer search, many a painful breach between our better theory and more imperfect practices. Again, there might be usages met with, not altogether welcome, upon the scores of choice or individual judgment; or he might miss some secondary things which he had been accustomed to. All this, and more to like effect, is probable enough. But looking only to the *spirit* and the *substance* of the matter—when such a visitant should hear the doctrines of our Church; should find us teaching the new birth in Baptism, and strengthening of the soul through the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ; when he should listen to our Creeds; should see our several ranks of ministers; should find us, not consenting merely, but wishing nothing

else than to make HOLY SCRIPTURE, interpreted by that presumed accordance with the preceding oral teaching of the Apostles, wherein he needs must recognize at once the only right and true mode of interpretation; can we believe, or for a moment think that such an one would hear or feel any thing insisted on as necessary to salvation, from which he must recoil; or any thing omitted, on the other hand, of vital necessity? Would he not rather be prepared to own, with joy, that even such had ever been, and were, his own substantial belief and principles? There would be found no novelties, clinging with parasitic power of damage to the sound stock of truth, brought in to meet some fancied crisis, or some distempered humour of the people; nor any rash, or forced, or over-strained *developments*. There would be little, I conceive, to startle, nothing to shock; but all would probably be felt to be essentially primitive.

Of course, in speaking thus I take it for granted, that the imagined visitant should thus be present, where adequate means of judgment were supplied; i. e. where all true privileges, claims, and primary doctrines of the Church were modestly, but healthfully, maintained. For instance; if either through mistaken notions of conciliation, or from whatever cause besides, we wave our title by descent as ministers of CHRIST, how could we answer such supposed examiner, should he pronounce that we had thereby severed our own branch from the one parent stem of

Truth? Again; if we deny, or otherwise forego traditional construction of CHRIST's own two Sacraments; especially, if we disclaim, or virtually undermine the doctrine of regeneration in Baptism (for, possibly, it is on that that every other insufficient estimate ensues) I do not see how we could answer to a charge of having brought in fundamental innovation. Again; should we too surely show ourselves usurpers, or ambitious overmuch, how could we stand the challenge, should it be asked, "How is it, then, that ye have sought dominion over your disciples' faith," not satisfied with being "helpers of their joy?" or, "Who, then, hath made you lords over your lots⁴, rather than examples to the flock?" (a thought deserving of the more remembrance, by reason of its source in an Epistle of St. Peter). But, being liable to none of these reproofs, should we be found tempering a needful firmness with a true Christian moderation; more careful of the truth than of ourselves; abiding by our own pledges; and neither seeking to usurp, nor daring to compromise; "eschewing whatsoever things are contrary to our profession," alike in doctrine and

⁴ μηδ' ὡς κατακυριεύοντες τῶν κλήρων, ἀλλὰ τύποι γινόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου. 1 Pet. v. 3.

κατακ. κλήρων, in the simple diction of the sacred writer, can only refer to *persons*. And the best commentators are in general agreed that it means the Churches or congregations called God's heritages, in allusion to the division of Canaan, κληροί, lots, which formed separate heritages.—*Bloomfield*.

in discipline; avoiding vain disputes, but exercising more and more a sound self-judgment; and while we cling fast to THE CHURCH, doing so only in full readiness to abide appeal to SCRIPTURE; then might we not with confidence endure the scrutiny of such an arbiter, as to the soundness and security of our position?

Here, then, in HOLY SCRIPTURE and THE CHURCH in HARMONY, is a safe anchorage of thought, wherein we may possess our souls in patience, as ministers of that pure and Apostolical branch of it to which we belong, under whatever prevalence of restless speculation round about us. And not only an anchor for ourselves, but safety for our flocks also. For, what can answer more exactly, according to the possibilities of things within our own heritage, to that which the Apostle charges⁵:—"Take heed unto thyself, and unto THE doctrine; continue in them; for in doing thus thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee?" What can we hope for more than this? what could we do more? Experience of eighteen hundred years forbids the thought of silencing perverse men; but we ourselves may find supporting strength "in quietness and confidence." With the authority of Holy Writ to sanction every thing the Church teaches, and with the guidance of the Church to limit and direct our use of Scripture, we may attain that far more precious end just quoted from St. Paul.

⁵ ἔπρεχε σεαυτῷ καὶ τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ.

And let not any fear that they will cripple, or wrongfully confine, the TRUTH by using it within such limitation ; nor yet that there may be injurious stint thereby imposed upon men's intellectual faculties. Think of the verities contained within the Creeds, and of the high and solemn spheres of contemplation into which these alone might open, consistently with the prescribed restraint of testing all things by the Word of GOD : again, of all collateral research, not only not forbidden, but commended, for the more full elucidation of the Scripture itself ; of all the lawful range of critical inquiry : again, of the exhaustless harmonies of Scripture with itself ; of adaptations of the things which have been, to the things which are, to be discovered and applied within the range of due remembrance of the analogy of faith, thence yielding a perennial supply of heaven-born principles, fairly deducible for positive use : —is there not ample field for man's best powers of mind herein afforded ? Not here to speak of the permitted range of merely human knowledge coincident with this, but looking only now to the peculiar department of divine truth, may it not righteously be asked, Where is the real need of perilously humouring an age of over-strained and pampered intellect, by entering on theories of fresh developments, which in effect amount to new revelations ? Will these, invented as they surely are to serve some temporary end ; perhaps, to satisfy some favourite scheme of doctrine ; perhaps, to gratify some yearning after this world's power ; perhaps, through some deceit of

self-idolatry—abide the test of Holy Scripture? They may, it is too true, reject, or mutilate, or override the word of truth; but if the truth in JESUS CHRIST be verily (as HE HIMSELF is) “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever,” it cannot, in its hitherto received shape, be wrested into an authority for such delusions.

Let it be granted—we shall not be in the sure way of “judging righteous judgment,” without remembering always in a believing spirit of humility, that, as our flocks, so we ourselves also are men of many differing shades, both of capacity and of taste. There are diversities of gifts under the same Spirit. Some, doubtless, both teachers and hearers, by constitution of their minds require more intellectual liberty, or even luxury, than others; and what forbids it to them within the boundaries assigned? Yet not the less is a just limitation of our common work required for common benefit of all. For, even with respect to these more gifted brethren, if they be “faithful men,” as often as they reach a point of speculation, at which man’s inability to see a further way, with his existing powers, is forced upon them as a *fact*, by their whole consciousness and whole experience alike; is it not obviously for their great benefit, to fall in with a monitory voice, which they may listen to without the slightest sense of degradation, which does but in effect remind them that they are not Gods—bidding them (as it were) to “go their way, for the words are closed up and sealed,” in that

direction, "till the time of the end?" Here may *infallibility* be found, with title to be revered and submitted to. While for all minds of narrower grasp, still greater consolation it must ever be to know, that after all there is but one thing common to us all of indispensable necessity; namely, for each and every one to seek, with a believing heart, to learn and do the will of God.

Let us be satisfied, in patience, with looking to the signs which are given; and teaching earnestly the truths to which it is quite sure "salvation" must belong—if we have not been "following cunningly devised fables" altogether—and though the world may scorn us, or we should be accounted men "behind the age," or dull and wearisome, or whatsoever else may be our burthen of reproach, we still may prove ourselves, abundantly, "workmen that need not be ashamed." There may be much yet wanting in our individual selves; much closer exercise of self-knowledge; much proving of our own faith; or much advancement in the way of personal holiness; but of our teaching—if it be verily according to the vows that are upon us—let us believe and trust we need have no misgivings. If the criterion just now imagined be not rejected as chimerical, or contrary to sound reason, it follows that we must have safe possession of "the simplicity that is in CHRIST," as nearly in a genuine and almost-native state as now is possible. And can that be a wrong or dangerous way, which there is every ground, both Scriptural and reasonable, for thinking that a Christian of the

Apostolic day might well approve and give consent to, if on earth ; and which so fairly meets the faculties and needs of all disciples ? Whereas that cannot be THE way, which unavoidably must make itself exclusive, or, in a phrase now much in use, but not very intelligible, eclectic. There must be something faulty in such way, whether it work its partial effect by an unwarranted appeal to inward impressions ; or by a theory at variance both with the general drift of Holy Writ and GOD's eternal attributes ; or through a tyranny which virtually makes the Gospel a system of bondage ; or by demanding an extravagant amount of deep learning, such as can never be the share of more than few ; or by insisting on high fancied claims of intellectuality ; or by excess of critical refinement, of tendency to treat the Book of Life as mere literature ; or, worst of all, perhaps, by an inversion of the order of Scripture, making material or secondary things the measure and the arbiters of things heavenly. THE way must surely be a way open to all, how few soever may pursue it, or attain unto it. It must be conversant with primary truths, affecting men's habitual faith and daily practice ; seeing these are the truths which Scripture most insists upon, and which (not any form of inward fancies or assurances, or any intellectual conceits) stand out in bold relief throughout that whole interpretation of the Bible by the Church, which we may well accept as Apostolical and true.

This simple partnership of SCRIPTURE and THE CHURCH, as Law and Commentary, when

honestly and calmly weighed, without regard to doubtful disputation, appears to meet all healthy workings of the human mind, with a security residing in itself against all dangerous excess. And let it not be lost sight of, that the interpretation thus provided is not that of an individual, however high his name, or title to be held in reverence. For the more weighty part, it is assuredly the judgment of the collective body of Christians, as entertained and understood not only in the days next following the introduction of the New Testament, but even antecedently to its existence. It is not, therefore, altogether based on mere reasoning and process of deduction; but, in some measure, on the evidence of the interpreters' own senses; a point which surely gives to primitive interpretation a separate and rare advantage over any other, and must accord best with the doctrine of "JESUS CHRIST the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

And how will this same view of Scripture and the Church in harmony, work its effects? In the most natural and easy manner; and with no feeling of constraint at all to reverent minds, except where it is absolutely needed. Are any of ourselves (for I am speaking to none others) inclined to fall into the peril of over-straining, or perverting HOLY SCRIPTURE by some uncertain, or, it may be, rash construction or wilfulness of private interpretation? Let such consult and hear THE CHURCH; particularly as speaking through the plain and long-acknow-

ledged sense of its more primitive devotions. They will see that assuredly borne out by the unerring standard; while such will not be found the case in any thing like equal measure with their own doubtful speculation. If by such reference, and consequent submission to so dispassionate, and high, and safe an authority, they be kept back from ruinous error—or, at the least, from error to be afterwards repented of—where is the room for any other feeling than a devout thankfulness? Must it not presently be felt to have been good for them to be restrained? Does our temptation, on the other hand, lie rather to the opposite excess, and towards an exalting of THE CHURCH beyond the warranty of HOLY SCRIPTURE? Let any new, or seemingly extravagant pretence of power or ascendancy be brought into the balance of “the law and of the testimony.” If so it shall be found to lead us into a strait demanding fresh “development,” and there be no safe ground discernible on which to look for such; a point for calm submission is arrived at there also, and is to be accepted with a like thankfulness. In all our ordinary practice, the joint result of the two counterpoising forces may be summed up as giving us a safe possession of the TRUTH “rightly divided,” and with it, of all healthful spiritual liberty.

Let it not be forgotten (in conclusion) that, as there is abundant scope allowed for intellectual exercise within the bounds prescribed to us, so there is obviously not less ample room for personal ex-

ertion. Nothing has now been said of that. But duties and responsibilities are best spoken of by voices of authority. All that has been attempted now, has been to show a place of shelter for our thoughts amidst besetting trials, through a familiar argument, which, trite as it may have appeared in separate details, may yet be found of useful power in its continuity; especially, perhaps, to those among us who have to labour in the loneliest fields, with fewest means and least immediate encouragements. Its greatest general usefulness, however—if it be sound, as I should hope, in its material points—may lie in helping towards just discernment between permanent principles, and variable (and so far comparatively unimportant) practices; in other words, between the *vital elements* of an enduring Church, and *usages* which, however excellent, do not affect its sure foundations. And not a little need does there appear to be, of our becoming fortified with carefully-considered judgment upon this head, before the hour of trial comes upon us. If, in the righteous and unerring counsels of our SUPREME HEAD, there shall be darker times in store for our own Church, such as will perilously try the spirits of many—it must be an advisable thing that we should not allow such evil day to take us by surprise. Yet, as things are, so many seem to look for danger with so partial a fear, and so exclusively from a single quarter, as to allow themselves but little power of observing from whence the cloud is

really arising. Our Church has shaken off before, and could shake off again, *excrescences* of superstition or deceit; but “if the *foundations* be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Let us beware alike of false alarms and of unworthy compromises; and may the grace and mercy of the LORD be with us, that in the day of proof we may be found faithful!

APPENDIX.

[See p. 9.]

THE illustrations which follow may serve sufficiently to evidence the speculative temper of the times in theological matters, and also to exhibit different patterns of development, with their respective tendencies or ascertained results. They are left to speak for themselves, with very little of remark.

No. I.

“ Perhaps I ought more distinctly to have stated what I mean by this growing school, whose theology derives much of its character from the works—especially the critical and exegetical works—of the great Protestant writers on the Continent. This school, though distinctly Protestant, by no means confines its sympathies to Protestantism. Its theological predilections are Catholic enough to appreciate all symptoms of intellectual vigour and earnest thought, wherever they are to be found. My belief is, that this school contains by far the greatest amount of the talent of the rising generation. Now there can be no doubt that it is a most essential characteristic of this school, to promote free discussion and patient inquiry on all subjects, as the only sure method of arriving at truth ; and that its members generally look with no very friendly eyes even on the easy bonds by which our existing tests confine the range of our intellects. This school, I suspect, will soon be found to contain the best scholars,

metaphysicians, and poets, of the rising age. It contains men of very various characters, who differ in many matters of opinion, and who, perhaps, often fancy themselves to belong to opposing parties ; but they are all united by the same eclectic-philosophical spirit, and the same admiration of intellect, wherever it develops itself—an admiration which seems sometimes in danger of leading them astray from the simplicity of the Gospel. If the men of this school can be saved from too latitudinarian and rationalizing a spirit—if their eclecticism does not degenerate into indifference or scepticism—if they can be made really to appreciate the vital importance of evangelical truth maintained in all its distinctive features, while they protest against the narrow-mindedness which would divorce it from the pursuits of intellect—if they can be made to sympathize with moral, as much as they now do with intellectual vigour—it is to this school that we must look as the best hope of the generation that is to stand in our place when we are dead.”—*Letter to the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford*. By A. C. TAIT, D.C.L. pp. 16, 17. (Note.) Blackwood and Son, 1845.

No. II.

Since the introduction of the Gospel, “human nature has made great progress, and society experienced great changes ; and in this advanced condition of the world, Christianity, instead of losing its application and importance, is found to be more and more congenial and adapted to man’s nature and wants. Men have outgrown the other institutions of that period when Christianity appeared—its philosophy, its modes of warfare, its policy, its public and private economy ; but Christianity has never shrunk as intellect has opened, but has always kept in advance of men’s faculties, and unfolded nobler views in proportion as they have ascended. The highest powers and affections which our nature has developed, find more than adequate objects in this religion. Christianity is, indeed, peculiarly fitted to the more improved stages of society, to the more delicate sensibi-

lities of refined minds, and especially to that dissatisfaction with the present state, which always grows with the growth of our moral powers and affections. As men advance in civilization, they become susceptible of mental sufferings to which ruder ages are strangers; and these Christianity is fitted to assuage. Imagination and intellect become more restless, and Christianity brings them tranquillity by the eternal and magnificent truths, the solemn and unbounded prospects which it unfolds. The fitness of our religion to more advanced stages of society than those in which it was introduced, to wants of human nature not then developed, seems to me very striking. The religion bears the marks of having come from a Being who perfectly understood the human mind, and had power to provide for its progress. This feature of Christianity is of the nature of prophecy. It was an anticipation of future and distant ages; and when we consider among whom our religion sprung, where, but in God, can we find an explanation of this peculiarity?"—Dr. CHANNING'S *Discourse*, March 21st, 1821.

The comparatively early date of this extract gives it the greater value, as being more illustrative of the quality of leaven which has been fermenting. The writer of it has been since immeasurably out-stripped by some of his transatlantic countrymen; but a later declaration of his own will abundantly suffice to show the natural tendency of such *developments*.

"He next gave us an account" (says Capt. Basil Hall, *Travels in North America*, vol. i. p. 115-16), "of his share in the progress of the controversies to which he alluded, and explained again and again to us, in a variety of different shapes, that his great end in advocating the *Unitarian*, or *Liberal* doctrines, was to set the human mind entirely free on religious subjects, without any reference—he earnestly assured us—to one sect more than another, but purely to the end that there might be, in the world at large, the fullest measure of intellectual independence of which our nature is capable. He spoke a good deal of the Christian dispensation, to which, however, he ascribed no special

illuminating powers, but constantly implied that every man was to judge for himself as to the degree and value of the light shed by Revelation. Reason and conscience, according to his view of the matter, ought to be our sole guides through life; and the efficacy of our Saviour's atonement was not, as far as I could discover, even once alluded to, except for the purpose of setting it aside." . . . "The Christian religion, he told us, as first preached by the Apostles, was well suited to those early times; but, according to him, it soon became corrupted, and was never afterwards purified, even at the Reformation. Much, therefore, still remained to be done; and one step in this great work, he led us to infer, was actually in progress before us, in the extension of Unitarianism."

No. III.

"The increase and expansion of the Christian Creed and Ritual, and the variations which have attended the process in the case of individual writers and Churches, are the necessary attendants on any philosophy or polity which takes possession of the intellect and heart, and has any wide or extended dominion. . . . From the nature of the human mind, time is necessary for the full comprehension and perfection of great ideas. . . . The highest and most wonderful truths, though communicated to the world once for all by inspired teachers, could not be comprehended all at once by the recipients—but, as received and transmitted by minds not inspired and through media which were human, have required only the longer time and deeper thought for their full elucidation. This may be called *The Theory of Developments*."—NEWMAN, *Essay on Development*, p. 27. (As quoted in *Quarterly Review*, No. cliv. p. 414.) We know too well where *this* theory has found a present end.

No. IV.

But every School would seem to have its own theory on this subject. Most widely different from that of the preceding writer (so different, indeed, as to declare itself opposed to it, as true to false) is that which an eloquent, and pious, and highly imaginative champion of "the fitness of Holy Scripture for upholding the spiritual life of men," contends for as "a true idea of Scriptural developments." But here it is extremely difficult to state a view so overlaid with gorgeous imagery and poetical diction, so as to be surely clear of misrepresenting it. But let an extract, meant to be taken fairly, present the notion of this writer as it best may. It is abridged, but I would hope not garbled:—

"Shall we determine, (he asks,) to know no other theology, no other results of Scripture, save those of the Church of the first ages?" . . . "Or again, were it not as great a mistake, as partial a view upon the other side, to require that the theology of the Reformation should be an ultimate term and law to us—to say that we would know nothing further, and to look, respectfully it may be, but still coldly, on any truths which were not at that day counted vital?" . . . "We may purpose, indeed, to live on what others have done, the mighty men of the days which are past, the fathers or revivers of our faith; and we may count that their gains will as much enrich us as they enriched them. But this will not prove so indeed; for it is a just law of our being, one of the righteous compensations of toil, that what a man wins by his labour—be it inward truth, or only some outward suppliance of his need—is ever far more really his own, makes him far more truly rich, than aught which he receives or inherits ready made, at the hands and from the toils of others. And they of whom we speak *earned* their truth, by toil and by struggle, by mighty wrestlings till the day broke; watering with the sweat of their brow, oftentimes with tears as of blood—yea, with the life-blood of their own hearts—the soil which yielded them in return a harvest so large. So was it, and so only, that they came again with joy, bearing their sheaves with them. And would we do

the same—let us first indeed see that we let nothing go—that we forfeit no part of that which we inherit at their hands : but also with a just confidence in that Blessed Spirit who is ever with His Church, who is ever leading it into the truth which it needs—let us labour, that through prayer and through study, through earnest knocking, through holy living, that inexhausted and inexhaustible word may render up unto us *our* truth—the truth by which *we* must live—the truth, whatsoever that be, which, more than any other, will deliver *us* from the lies with which we in our time are beset, which will make *us* strong where we are weak, and heal us where we are divided, and enable us most effectually to do that work which our GOD would have done by us in this our day of toil.”—TRENCH, *Hulsean Lectures*, 1845, pp. 106-8.

In this we have undoubtedly the mind of a devout believer ; and there is much in it to which both heart and judgment may consent. Yet does it not too much appear, in some respects, to indicate a hope of something more like new revelations, than only fresh and lawful applications of the old—and, still more certainly, to open into possible results, such as would surely make the fancy of some, and the fanatical zeal of others, the judges and expositors of Scripture doctrine ?

None of these passages, however, are quoted with the slightest view of controversy ; but, as before said, simply for purposes of illustration. If they may serve that turn, it is enough. The reader who may wish to watch more daring flights, may find some in an article on “ Pantheistic Tendencies,” in the last number (lii.) of the *Christian Remembrancer*. Those who agree with the present writer in fearing that there is more or less of error and danger in all, will probably agree also, that their worst danger lies in that confusion and intermixture of truth which is traceable in all ; and their error, in too much substitution of *intellectual and theoretical*, for simply *dutiful and practical* views of our abiding Revelation.

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